

1856

23

THE CHURCH THE CHANNEL OF PERSONAL HOLINESS.

A SERMON

Preached in St. James's Church, Paris, C. W.,

ON WHITSUNDAY, 1856;

AND AT PRINCETON, ON TRINITY SUNDAY.

BY ADAM TOWNLEY,

INCUMBENT, PARIS, C. W.

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THE CHURCH

The Channel of Personal Holiness.

ST. JOHN XIV. 18.—“*I will not leave you comfortless ; I will come to you.*”

My friends, this ought to be a very triumphant and joyous festival with us ; for it is the anniversary of that glorious day on which the promise of our text began to be fulfilled. We say *began* “to be fulfilled,” because it is an *abiding* promise, given in all its richness to the Church of every age, so long as time shall last.

When on the day of Pentecost this promise that the blessed Jesus would ever dwell with His people, first became “yea and amen” to the Church, by the miraculous pouring forth of the Holy Ghost—the Comforter, proceeding from the Father and Himself, then did those “last days” commence of which the Apostles say so much, and in which it is our high privilege to live. The provision which Christ made, before He ascended again to heaven, for causing the Holy Ghost continually to dwell in His faithful elect people, and for the continuance, as it were, of His bodily presence in his visible Church, are God’s last great gifts to His chosen. There is, we speak it with reverence, nothing more for God to give, until He remove us to His own immediate presence, He has truly emptied Himself of all but love, hence these are “the last days”—from Penticost to Judgment is one—the dispensation of Christ and His Spirit.

My brethren, this is a most glorious fact regarded in itself; but when we turn to the Church it is on the contrary, as appalling! For alas! alas! the worldliness, the indifference, the divisions, the bitterness of the modern Church are, methinks, equally unfit to succeed the day of Pentecost, or to usher in that of Judgment! And yet, we repeat, heaven has nothing more to impart in order to our holiness, these are the "last days." Stay, there is one thing more which love has in store, it is to send forth the angel of chastisement, or to unchain the great adversary; that amidst the wailings of our bereaved hearts, the conflicts of fierce temptations or fires of persecution, a present Saviour and a sanctifying Comforter,—the blessed heritage of these "last days,"—may be once more understood and lived for!

If, then, it be the fact that we are living in those same "last days" which commenced with the Apostolic age, and that ours is indeed God's *last*, His best and greatest dispensation to man, that of Christ and the Holy Spirit conjoined, it is evident that we, the Church of the present day, ought to be imbued with that same holiness which distinguished the primitive disciples, and which will mark the faithful who shall be living on the earth when the last trumpet sounds; our dispensation is the *same*, why should not our love and purity be the *same*. Alas! that they are not so! Let me invite you then to unite with me in humiliation and prayer of heart, while I endeavour to show,—

I. Wherein we live below our dispensation, and are inferior in vital godliness to those who, in earlier days, lived under the same; and,—

II. Enquire to what we must attribute this difference.

I. We have no wish to depreciate the Church of our own times, it is indeed no pleasure to do so. We know that in the most primitive days offences were not wanting; there were false brethren, heresies, lovers of the world, yea, Apostles had to complain of a Diotrephes, a Demas, an Alexander; we look not for perfection here; there will be stains even upon the garments of the Heavenly Bride while she remains upon earth; the tares and the wheat cannot be entirely separated until the great harvest comes. But still, brethren, it were only a grievous deception of our own souls to deny that we are not what our fathers were, even to a comparatively late period, in love and zeal; nor in fact what we expect our descendants

to be when the Son of Man appeareth. Most strange is it that it should be so, but, alas ! most true. As a little reflection on *three* points of our short comings will plainly show, namely, our inferiority in personal devotion ; in self-denying care for the poor ; and ~~in~~ our sordid indifference to the dignity, the due support, and the extension of the worship of Almighty God.

First then, how brief and cold are our personal devotions as compared with Apostolic times, with early Christianity, or with that of our own forefathers.

Concerning the worship of New Testament disciples we read thus, "And they continuing *daily* with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread" (apparently in the Holy Communion) "from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." Again we read of the Apostles that "*daily* in the temple, and in every house," the people of course attending, "they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." Thus we see incessant worship was at least the desire of the faithful, and be it noted that those were the days when "the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved;" *daily worship produced daily converts.* A little further on, in our present dispensation, and we find Wednesdays and Fridays special days of public and private devotion ; daily morning and evening public prayer frequent ; the Holy Communion weekly, or indeed oftener, with private devotion at the third, sixth, and ninth hours of the day, and not unfrequently early and late besides, yea, and in the night season also ; such were the common stated seasons of prayer and supplication with the holy for very many ages in the Church ; three, five, seven times in the day and night, or even still more frequently.

Can we wonder, brethren, that such men of prayer proved religion to be a reality ; found Christ in His Church, and felt the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, ever dwelling in their hearts ? Yea, need we be surprised that ferocious beasts and cruel tortures were no terror ; or that the fire lost its power over men who lean't upon Jesus, with God in their bosoms and heaven in their eye ! Nor do we marvel that in the last portion of these "last days" men who trod in the same steps of constant devotion, as Bishops Andrews, Wilson, Ken, Fenelon ; the holy Farrar, the pious

Nelson, the devout Fletcher, should have still blessedly proved how truly these our "last days" are the glorious dispensation of Christ and the Holy Spirit!

Brethren, that we have as a people swerved from these habits of constant devotion, I mourn to think is, but too evident to you all.

2. But that we are also fallen from primitive care of our suffering brethren is, alas! equally clear. In the Divine record before quoted, I find it again thus written, "Neither was there any amongst them that lacked, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the Apostles' feet; and distribution was made to every man according as he had need." And these times of brotherly love and kindness, mark you, were the days when the promises pertaining to this our dispensation were gloriously fulfilled; for Christians were then "full of the Holy Ghost and of faith;" their "souls prospered" like that of Gaius, their "hearts, like Lydia's, were opened to the Lord," and while willing to stay in order to serve the Church, their bounding hearts yet "longed to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." Because they loved their brother, Christ loved them and gave them largely of His Spirit.

Mark also in later times the single Church of Antioch supporting its thousands of Christian widows, orphans, and poor. Yea, coming nearer still to these degenerate days. Go and count the alms-houses, the charity-schools for holy secular education, and the other monuments of the brotherly love of your own ancestors in our father-land; and then say whether our religion, judged not only by New Testament times, but by Catholic Christianity wherever it has been in earnest, be worthy of the "latter days" of the dispensation of Christ and the Spirit? Where is our self-denying care of the poor? our efforts to treat them as brethren in Christ? Where are our alms-houses, hospitals, houses of refuge for repentant sinners? Or, our Christian Schools for the *daily* instruction of our Children in their never-to-be-divided duties to God and man? Who now gives largely to these things? Where are the individuals who dedicate whole fortunes to them, as in the earlier days of our present dispensation? Need we be surprised that men are looking for another and a higher dispensation; that Irvingites, Mormons, Spirit-Rappers, Families

of Love, with the whole spawn of filthy sects which are springing from the stagnant waters of our corrupted Christianity, corrupted by the foul admixture of the world, the flesh, and the devil, should in fact be seeking the developments of some new plan of salvation, if not even absolutely looking for another Christ.

3. But, finally, our unworthy abuse of that glorious "latter day" dispensation in which we are actually living, is further evidenced by our indifference to the worship of Almighty God, and to the spread of the Redeemer's Kingdom, by the only legitimate method, the support and increase of His Church. Hear the Apostle expostulating, at the dictation of the Holy Ghost, with the Corinthians respecting the proprieties and the reverence demanded by public worship. Hear him again praising the Churches for more than supplying his necessities as *an Apostle*. Watch the multitude of the disciples how when scattered by persecution, they rejoice to preach Jesus to the nations around. In later times mark the same love to Christ, the same reverence for the majesty of God, and the same care for the salvation of men, in the thousands of the Christian priesthood going forth to plant the cross amongst the most barbarous hordes, oftentimes with their lives in their hands ; again see the same love and zeal manifested by the wealth poured into the Church because she is the Bride of Christ ; see it again in the numberless Churches, the strength and beauty of the meanest of which excite our admiration ; while the Cathedrals of Christendom are at this day our glory and our shame ; we glory to be the sons of the sires that raised them, we blush at our own degeneracy, since we grudge alike the time to worship in them, and the cost to keep them even in repair ! O brethren, are we not bitterly fallen ? It is not that our zeal and wealth has found what we esteem as purer channels ; no, my brethren, we keep our money *for ourselves*, and our zeal for railroads, telegraphs, land speculations, godless education, and all the rabble of demon worship ! Where are our tithes to God, our tithes to the poor, and our free will offerings to the temple, and its beauty ? Alas, alas ! my brethren, I hear the derisive echo of infernal mockery, enquiring "Where?" And yet we *are* living in the glorious dispensation of Jesus and of the Holy Ghost !

Let us, therefore, seeing, alas ! that these things cannot be denied, proceed to enquire,—

II. What is the cause of the degeneracy and the earthliness of the English and Irish Church and her daughters in these "last days," seeing our dispensation is God's last and best, and that the doctrines taught and the discipline enjoined by our Church are eminently pure, scriptural, and primitive.

Were you seeking to discover the reason why there is so little of holiness in the Papal Churches, you would with sorrow of heart, at once, attribute it to their corruption of the pure, evangelical doctrines of the Gospel; and you would be right. But, as just stated, this is not the case with the Anglican Church, her Prayer-Book is, to a wondrous degree, a simple transcript of Scriptural truth, as understood by pure Catholic antiquity. You will say, perhaps, that our spiritual degeneracy is owing to our worldliness of mind, and consequent want of devotion. Again you are right; but it is exactly the reason why that worldliness and want of devotion, should be greater amongst us than in the Primitive Church, seeing that our dispensation and privileges are the *same*, that we want to discover. And the best way to do this, will be by enquiring if there be any radical difference between the faith of Primitive Christians and our own. They are then alike in spiritual doctrines, as we have seen; but, alas! there is a sad want in us of *that simple confidence* in the promises of Jesus EVER TO DWELL IN HIS CHURCH AND SEND HIS SPIRIT THROUGH HER ORDINANCES, which so pre-eminently marked the faith of the early Church: and to this infidelity of heart as respects Christ and the Comforter being in His Church, we do mainly attribute the want of holiness amongst ourselves. The early Church, and indeed our fathers, believed all these promises in their fullness and simplicity; they looked for Christ and His blessed Spirit in every institution and ordinance connected with His Church. Hence they believed,—

1st. That Jesus was peculiarly and personally, though invisibly, present, when His members were assembled for public worship according to His own promise, that "where two or three—He spoke to, and of, His members—were gathered together in His name, He would be in their midst, and that to bless them;" and that consequently grace was more certainly and specially to be obtained on those occasions than at other times.

And let it be noted, my brethren, that it was through that strengthening

of their faith and that increase of their grace which resulted from sincere attendance upon those public assemblies of the Church, whereby the blessed Jesus is already "glorified in His saints, and *openly* admired in all them that believe," that they became possessed of the desire for, and the power to ~~exercise~~, those earnest, frequent, and oftentimes long continued private devotions, to which we have before alluded, as distinguishing the members of Christ in former days.

2nd. They believed that to the Christian Priesthood,* who had been duly ordained by the Apostles or their successors. Jesus had given the same priestly powers that He Himself possessed; according again to His own words, "As the Father hath sent me, ^{so} send I you;" and to the commands which He had given them to "remit sins," to excommunicate, to bless, to baptize, &c. Indeed, they doubted not but that like as Christ after giving the Apostles their commission as His ambassadors, breathed on them, saying, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," and that as St. Paul declares, the Holy Ghost had been imparted to St. Timothy, "by the laying on of his hands," so also their clergy receive the Holy Ghost at their ordination, not then for personal sanctification, but as our own Prayer Book says, "for the office and work of a priest in the Church of God." Therefore, they

* I have used the words "priest" and "priestly," and cognate terms, advisedly. I have done so for the sake of distinctness; and because I know of no name for the second order of the Christian ministry, so scriptural, so evangelical, so primitive, and so proper in the mouth of a faithful son of the Anglican Church. "So scriptural,"—it was the name given by Jehovah Himself to those ecclesiastical officers, who were a portion of that dispensation which was, as Holy Scripture states, the type or shadow, of which the Heavenly or Christian Church is the substance. But yet more strongly, Christ positively declares that the Apostolic Ministry share His office, why then should they fear, or be ashamed to share the name of His office, and avow themselves "priests" with Him, whose highest human office is being the "Great High Priest of our profession."

"Evangelical,"—no appellation more distinctly teaches that our office derives all its efficacy from its intimate connection with the Priesthood of Christ Himself, so also as its name implies, its very noblest function is offering not a *bloody and propitiatory sacrifice* as the Papists do arrogantly, if not blasphemously pretend, but a *memorial sacrifice*, which conveys afresh the efficacy of the sufferings and death of the blessed Jesus to those who faithfully receive it.

"Primitive,"—being terms which can be traced to a very early period; as may be seen at once in the learned ecclesiastical antiquary, Bingham, Archdeacon

questioned not but that, if themselves were rightly prepared, their pardon was afresh sealed in heaven, whensoever their priests gave them absolution; and so in like manner, that when blessing was duly pronounced by priestly lips, grace and mercy from the Great High Priest were distilled into the hearts of the faithful. In a word, they looked to their ministers as "stewards of the mysteries of God," and as having therefore power and authority to impart those mysteries to the sincere of heart.

3rd. The Primitive Church believed sanctification and the subsequent indwelling of the Holy Spirit to accompany Baptism, duly administered and received; that it is in fact, "a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness."

They also nothing doubted, but that in the Holy Eucharist, according to the declaration of St. Paul, the "Cup of blessing" which their priests blessed, was "the communion of the blood of Christ," and that the Bread which they broke was "the communion of the body of Christ." Hence, they believed that Christ still dwelt really, though mystically, in His human presence in this Body—the Church; and that in the Holy Communion especially,

Daubeny, as quoted by Dr. Hook, of Leeds, thus speaks concerning the words *altar*, *priest*, and *sacrifice*, "I must remind you that these terms were universally used in the Primitive Church, long before the Popish corruption was ever thought of; and were always considered as words that conveyed the most high and important signification." Says, also, the Rev. John Wesley, "We believe there is and always was in every Christian Church (whether dependant on the Bishop of Rome or not) an outward priesthood, ordained by Jesus Christ, and an outward sacrifice offered therein, by men authorised to act as ambassadors of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."

"Proper in the mouth of a faithful son of the Anglican Church." At the ordination of every Presbyter or Minister of the second order in the English Church, "the bishop, with the priests present, lay their hands upon the head" of the candidate, and the bishop says, "Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands." And in consistency with this, we are styled *priests* all through the Prayer Book, and priestly functions are therein assigned us.

For these reasons, I have used the, to many I regret to say, obnoxious term *priest*, and similar distinctive words. They tell of Christ's appointed channels of grace, and surrounded as we are by a scoffing world, and an ignorant and luke-warm Church, I dare not give the Gospel trumpet an uncertain sound.

He did enable His chosen, as He has said they must in order to eternal life, "to eat his flesh and drink His blood." That is, early Christians and our forefathers rejoiced to think that the Father does impart the efficacy of His Divine Son's humanity to the bread, and wine when blessed by His appointed ambassadors, insomuch that, as our own Prayer Book does so scripturally and evangelically still teach, "The body and blood of Christ are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper;" through these creature elements of bread and wine, thus elevated by the power of Him who spake a world from nought, to so glorious a mystery.

4th. They further believed in the peculiar powers of the Episcopate; that its members are the Divinely appointed rulers of the Church, being alone authorized by Christ to perpetuate His ministry with all its sacred powers and functions. It was at their bishop's hands also, that they ever sought to obtain afresh the strengthening grace of the Holy Spirit in confirmation; and, in its highest measure, the more ordinary privileges of priestly blessing and grace.

5th. Finally, the primitive saints, and indeed our fathers, believed that self-denial fastings and alms deeds are ordinances of grace to those who faithfully use them; yea, and so necessary that without their accompaniment, prayer itself becomes a barren sacrifice. Hence, they did not satisfy themselves with an easy flesh-pleasing service; nor yet were they content to "offer unto the Lord their God of that which cost them nothing."

They felt that they needed deeply to humble themselves before God; and that also they were beset by those sinful lusts of the flesh which continually require to be mortified and "kept under;" therefore, like their Divine Master and His Apostles, they were "in fastings often."

So, in like manner, their alms deeds were abundant. They would have esteemed it as bitter mockery to have offered their prayers to God, and yet to have withheld from His Church and poor what we should deem a very large portion of their worldly substance. Supplications for an inheritance amid the lavish splendours of the New Jerusalem offered in a neglected, barn-like Church; or prayers in our own closets for our "daily

bread," both earthly and heavenly, while our brethren are left by us, comparatively unheeded, in earthly trouble and spiritual destitution, are the dishonourable peculiarities of the Church in this "enlightened age."

And, my brethren, it was when fastings and alms deeds were thus "the wings of prayer," that Christians found that pride, passion, lust, avarice, and all "this kind" of devils did "go forth." They also knew by blessed experience that "God will be no man's debtor;" but that for every self-denying offering they gave to Him and His poor, He returned them in this life a hundred fold; and already in Paradise have they a blessed foretaste of the infinite benefit they will derive, in the day of His coming, from having here "made friends of the mammon of unrighteousness." Their fastings, prayers, and alms are now found, like those of Cornelius, to be no mean "memorials before God!"

Alas! for the self-indulgence and self-seeking of modern Christianity!

Such, my brethren, we find to have been the holy confidence which apostolic and early Christians, yea, and our fathers also, had in the faithfulness of the promises which Jesus had made to His elect that He and the Holy Spirit will continually dwell in His Church and manifest themselves through her ordinances to the faithful. And need we wonder, brethren, knowing the covenant truth of our heavenly Father, that, in fulfilment of His own promise, "It was done unto them according to their faith." *They diligently sought for Christ and His Spirit where they had promised to be found, and the consequence was, that "they grew in grace daily and in the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord."* This then is the secret of the members of the Church in those days, being so much holier than in these later times!

You will perhaps think that we have unduly exalted the Church, her priesthood, and her ordinances; but not so: it is God, not we, that has "put such treasure into earthen vessels;" and He has even condescended to give us His reason for doing so, even that "the honor may be all of God and not of man;" since by using such mean and apparently inefficient agents, he shows how entirely the grace and power come directly from Himself, and in no wise rest in any degree, inherently in the agents whom

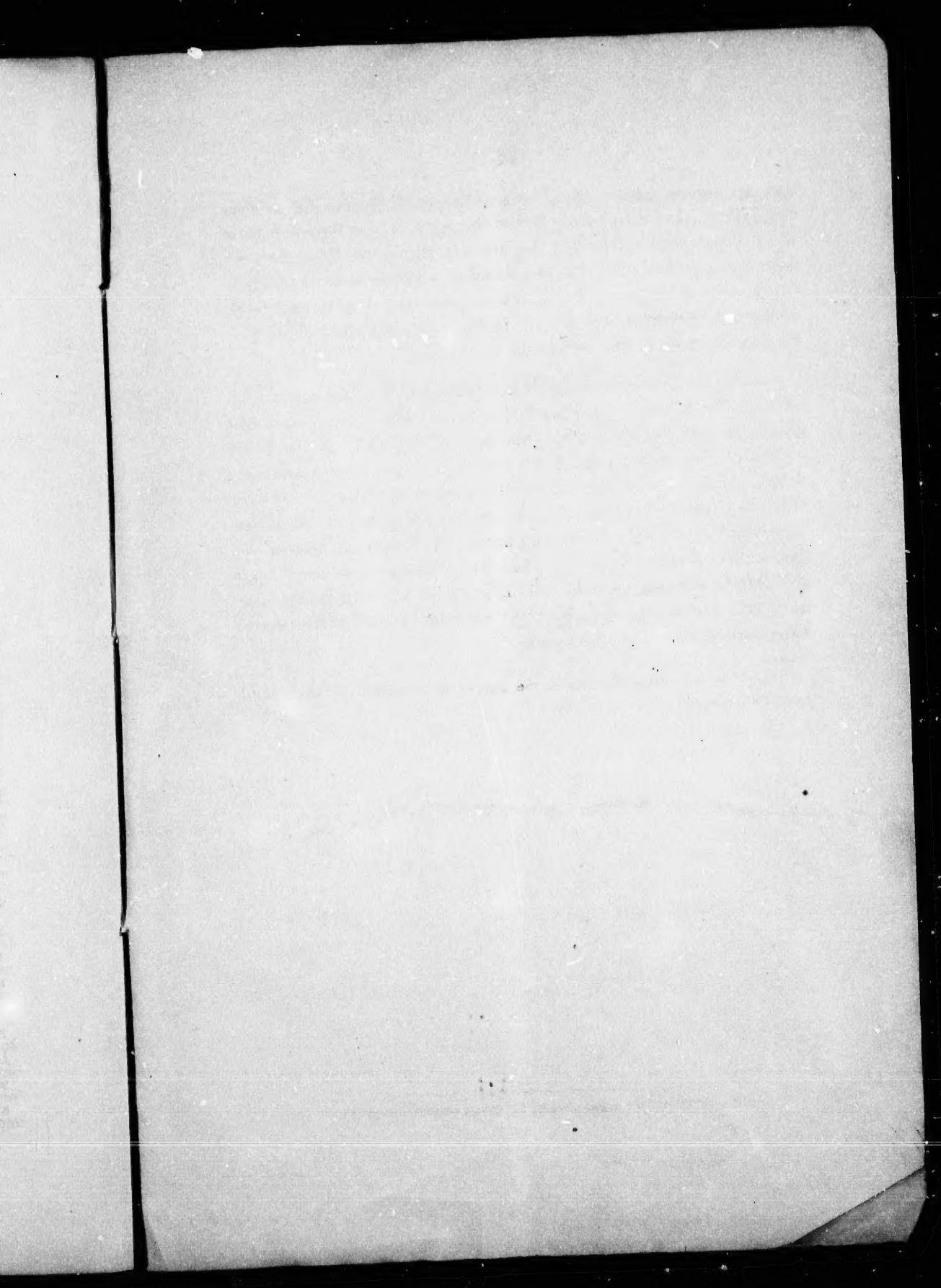
He thus stoops to employ. Yet I am quite prepared to be stigmatized by false or mistaken brethren, and by those who are without, as an ultra-high-churchman, a Puseyite or a Romanist, for thus declaring the whole truth of Christ. Well, be it so; if they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, need we marvel at any approbrious epithets which they apply to his servants? I only know, that as a people, we who dwell under this, the *last*, the final and most glorious dispensation of Christ and the Holy Ghost, *are not holy*, as were our Christian fore-fathers, who lived in these same "last days" with ourselves; if therefore I have in any measure succeeded in convincing you of the reason of this, your want of holiness, I will rejoice, even though I should myself be the more exceedingly despised.

But let us look whether the cause we have assigned, be sufficient to account for these sad results. Some persons will perhaps think not; because, this being eminently the dispensation of the Spirit, they will say surely spiritual worship, without the Ordinances of the Church must be sufficient. Such reasoners, however, forget that it is the dispensation of the *man* Christ Jesus, as well as of the Spirit. To the honor of Christ's humanity, therefore, as well as out of infinite compassion to us, the Father is pleased to convey salvation to us through the body of Jesus;—a priesthood, sacraments, a church, all of which are really though mystically, connected with his human nature now dwelling in heaven. Our bodies and souls are thus sanctified and saved by the Holy Ghost acting in unison with the body and soul of the Blessed Jesus. Thus at the same time, Jesus is honoured, and the obtaining of grace made inconceivably easier to ourselves, by our bodies and outward senses, becoming helps instead of hinderances, to faith and godly living. How difficult it is for us to fix our minds upon Christ and His man's, and to believe that for his sake we shall *now* obtain the grace or mercy we are asking, we all know. But when a *certain* time and place is fixed, by Christ himself, for more specially and certainly imparting the blessings we seek, and the *particular* individual appointed, through whose ministrations they are ordinarily to be received,—if only we approach in sincerity, deplored our sins and simply believing the promises of Christ,—how infinitely easier does faith, and consequently salvation, become. And, because we do not thus simply come expecting Christ in his ordinances, and through his appointed Ambassa-

dors, we remain unholy; while, because earlier Christians did so come and believe, they were holy! It was the sight of the Brazen Serpent which concentrated the faith of the Israelites when bitten by the fiery serpents; so it is the *visible* ordinance founded on and sanctified by the positive promise of our own Jehovah, which makes the faith of such feeble creatures as ourselves, who are yet in the body, comparatively easy,—through the ordinance we discern the Saviour! —

At all events, brethren, we know that primitive Christians not only believed in Christ, but that they believed in Him IN His Church, and sought Him there, and they were holy;—you believe in Christ, but you do not believe in Him in and through his Church, and you are comparatively unholy! Oh! then at last believe the promise of Christ; believe the teaching of your own Prayer-Book, and with the holy men of old, believingly seek Christ IN His Body, the Church. And then my beloved, you also, without doubt, shall be holy; and thus “walking with God,” begin at length to comprehend, with the Christians of former days, the deep reality of a religion whose “God is love,” whose glory is the “Lamb slain.” Amen and Amen, even so Lord Jesus.

N. B.—There are a few additions to the sermon as preached, and some unimportant alterations. A. T.



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